

Sun shone on the 2024 Rabobank South Auckland Herd Tour

On paper it looked like we were going to spend hours in the bus, but in hindsight every hour we travelled was so worthwhile and the tour was over in a flash, replenishing our belief in the Hereford family.

We started the week with the AGM and breed dinner along with the youth auction. It wasn't a late night, so we were fresh to embark on our first day visiting Donna and Steve at Knightlands. We were all impressed by the condition and evenness of their first calves, with calves at foot and with their scanning rate of 790 Herefords mated with only 3% empty. Donna explained they pregnancy test all their cows and cull empties. Over the years they have also been very conscious of buying bulls with good bony orbit around their eyes to avoid cancer eye, however theileria and facial eczema are their top health concerns. Donna's veterinary knowledge which she uses in practical ways to improve their herd kept us engaged and the morning tea prepared us for our next short trip to Charwell.

At Charwell we were greeted by Peter and Penny and their daughter Annabel. Paul Charteris, the LIC beef genetics lead, gave a quick update on the LIC beef programme, saying that they are looking for better growth and muscling than they had in the past. He also wanted to reassure the Association that Herefords are by far the most important beef breed for the dairy industry with the sale of 270,000 straws out of a total of half a million.

At Charwell we viewed bulls Koanui Big Time P215, Limehills Stardom 168, Otapawa Rio Grande 9073 by TH Frontier and Okawa Saracen 200175 (NZ top price bull in 2022). Peter had selected a mob of 8 heifers sired by Saracen, one of which, the top bidder at the HP auction could choose. Our last stop of the day was at Kairuru Herefords. As normal the condition of the cows was a great credit to Jane and Kevin. Their calves at foot, some of which were by top Australian sires Injemira Robert Redford and Wirruna Nixon, were looking fantastic. Kevin's immaculate new shed was also impressive and a top-class venue to host drinks to mark the end of the day. It was a big effort to get us all back on the bus to Taupo! We had a guest speaker from Rabobank entertain us at dinner that night and an award presented to Robert Kane for being the closest at guessing the weight of the cow and calf at Knightlands the previous day.

Day 2 started with a trip to McCormicks - home of Rock-End Herefords. Josh, Pete & the McCormick Family welcomed us and showed us a great line of cattle which is well suited to their hill country environment classed as 6/7, where they are grazed for at least 11 months of the year, replicating a common commercial reality.

We then had a long drive to Bushy Downs Herefords. Kelvin Port gave us the history behind Bushy Downs and explained their genetic objectives with a focus on fertility and maternal traits suited to the dairy industry. Several pure horned cows remain in the herd which are mated to polled sires. The Ports hope that the traditional strengths of those dams will be carried forward to be of high genetic value to the herd and the breed.

Our last stop of the day was to visit Sue and Colin Corney's to view animals from the Colrairie Herefords & Kanuka Polled Herefords studs. It was interesting to hear how the Russos and Corneys collaborated to enhance their genetics. Waikato dictates their largely dairy market for bulls, so they endeavour to keep birthweights moderate, whilst still breeding for enough growth to have yearling bulls big enough to mate mature dairy cows. The Hereford Prime NZ auction at the end of the day was a success & everyone enjoyed a Hereford Prime steak - big thank you to Magills Butchery for their support.

With a short drive from Hamilton airport to Craigmore Herefords on day 3, some members enjoyed a sleep in after the previous night's entertainment. The Hendersons weigh all their cattle at 400 days to ensure they get the growth rate required and they only keep the heifers that are up to target weight to keep the desired size. David said it was important for them prior to buying a bull to look at EMA, Fats and IMF, with EMA to be in the top 10% with positive fats and positive IMF.

Anna Boyd from Beef+Lamb NZ Genetics gave a short talk and demonstration on the importance of Body Conditioning Scoring before we got on the bus to drive to John and Mary Allen at Mahuta. Mahuta is known for specialising in catering for the dairy-heifer market focusing on the importance of calving ease. I enjoyed seeing Mahuta Ocean who is now an old boy who had performed very well in the BLG/LIC Dairy Beef Progeny trial. Day 3 ended with a seafood banquet in Coromandel and a dark drop off at the Coromandel campsite which made finding our cabins interesting.

Our last day was spent driving down the Coromandel coast visiting the Wards, Hoobees and Browns. We started off the day with a bang, eating Hereford steaks and carrot cake for breakfast courtesy of the Ward family at their café "Hereford n a Pickle". We then spent time looking at their cows, and calves. Roy told me he was a fortunate breeder, as after many years of testing their bulls for IMF, he is nearly always right when he picks which bull sired the progeny that he's tasting being sold in the café, as the taste is so closely correlated to the IMF score! From there we visited an impressive mob of Robert Redford progeny belonging to Bryce and Sue Hooton, before we drove to their quiet cows & calves. Last stop on the tour was a visit to Maranui Herefords & Angus studs, when Graeme explained the breeding objectives, of easy calving, good fats, low BW (but not too low) to supply to the dairy market. The cows & calves were looking great, helped by a good season.

Day 4 was a highlight for many of us as we hadn't previously made the trip to visit the Coromandel studs. We were impressed with the amount of DNA testing these studs are doing and the way they overcome the challenge of their remoteness.

Farewells and thanks, were had especially to Rabobank who were this year's wonderful naming right sponsor of the herd tour. The finale was the foundation of the newly formed NZ Hereford Aged club! Contact Doc Sidey to see if you meet the criteria!